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OPERATIONS OF THE 607TH FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION (71ST INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE CROSSING OF THE DANUBE RIVER EAST OF REGENSBURG, GERMANY, 25 - 27 APRIL 1945.

(CENTRAL EUROPE CAMPAIGN)

(Personal experience of the Battalion Survey and Reconnaissance Officer)

Type of operation described: ARTILLERY BATTALION
IN SUPPORT OF A RIVER
CROSSING.

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ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE NO II

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
Index	1
Bibliography	2
Introduction	4
General Situation	7
Special Situation	9
Combat Organization of the 607th Field Artillery Battalion	11
From the Regen to the Danube	13
The River Crossing	27
Analysis and Criticism	34
Lessons	38
Map A -	
Map B - XX Corps Operations, Crossing the Danube River, 18-26 April 1945	
Map C - Operations 607th Field Artillery Battalion, 25-27 April 1945	
Diagram 1 - Fire Control Radio Net, 607th Field Artillery Battalion	
Diagram 2 - Battalion Wire Net, 607th Field Artillery Battalion	

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers operations of the 607th Field Artillery Battalion, 71st Infantry Division, in crossing the Danube River near Regensburg, Germany during the period 25-27 April 1945.

In retrospect a brief resume of events prior to the above operations will give the reader an idea of enemy capabilities as opposed to those of our own forces. The back of the Wehrmacht (German Ground Forces) had been broken by the assault of Allied Forces west of the Rhine River and rapid exploitation of successful bridgeheads across the Rhine. East of the Rhine the Campaign for Central Europe degenerated into a rapid pursuit of the enemy. Fierce fighting on a large scale was encountered only in predominantly Nazi populated cities such as Nurnberg and Munich where the Wehrmacht would force a stand primarily for morale purposes.

Deep penetrations of armor followed closely by infantry severely disrupted Axis lines of communication resulting in a complete break down of their replacement and supply system. Remnants of the Luftwaffe (German Air Forces) were grounded due to lack of fuel, allowing utter freedom of movement by our forces. Infantry divisions advanced from fifteen to thirty miles a day, their role being to follow the armor as closely as possible, mopping up isolated pockets of enemy resistance. German units of company and battalion strength were

caught hiding in woods and village basements, their food and ammunition gone, their leadership existing largely in a few die-hard S.S. (1) non-coms. The will to resist in the individual German soldier had been broken, and the majority would have surrendered gladly had it not been for fear of a bullet in the back from their own leaders. In many cases registration of a single artillery piece on a village was sufficient to enable a squad of infantry to enter unopposed and mop up any semblance of resistance. (2)

By mid-April, 1945, forces of the Third U. S. Army, overwhelmingly superior in both men and equipment, were executing a drive across the heart of Germany that had gained an almost unbelievable momentum. The Germans were so disorganized that they had no time to effect minimum delaying action. Routine performance of our artillery was to occupy two, three, and four gun positions a day without firing a round as battalions moved up behind the infantry. During a two week period in early April 1945, the 607th Field Artillery Battalion pulled the lanyard sixty three times -- primarily for registration. (3) For American soldiers the nectar of success was sweet, and they drank heartily. Morale was at a peak; there existed a strong esprit-de-corps in all commands; each and every man thought himself capable of fighting and beating several times his number. (4)

Such was the condition of the enemy and our own forces, when, on or about 15 April 1945, Third Army's XX Corps received the mission of spearheading a Third Army drive south

(1) S.S. designated the German Elite Corps, consisting mostly of fanatical Nazi who were excellent fighters; (2) Personal knowledge; (3) A-9; (4) Personal knowledge.

and east along an axis of advance, Bamberg, Regensburg, Steyer, to effect a juncture with Russian forces concurrently attacking west from Vienna, Austria. (See Map A) XX Corps was to relinquish command of the 76th Infantry Division, the 4th and 6th Armored Divisions, west of Chemnitz, move to its new zone of action on the right of XII Corps, and there by prepared to attack on Army order. The 71st Infantry Division, the 65th Infantry Division, the 80th Infantry Division, the 13th Armored Division, and the 3d Cavalry Group reinforced by the 5th Ranger Battalion were attached to XX Corps to accomplish its mission. (5)

The Corps Commander's plan was to attack with the 71st and 65th Divisions abreast, the 71st on the Corps left flank. The 3d Cavalry Group reinforced was to be utilized on a reconnaissance mission across the Corps front in order to conserve the 13th Armored Division until the Danube River had been crossed and to allow it time to perform much needed armor maintenance. The 80th Division and 13th Armored Division were to be in Corps reserve initially near Bamberg. (6)

It was anticipated that the German 2d and 11th Panzer Divisions would be shifted from Czechoslovakia into the Corps zone of advance, but the fighting efficiency of these two organizations was so depleted that little concern was given such action. The 2d Panzer Division was estimated to have the strength of a battalion, and the 11th Panzer Division had little more than 2000 men and 20 tanks. It was further anticipated that two Hungarian divisions would be en-

(5) A-1, p. 1; A-2, p. 358-360; A-3, p. 71; A-4, p. 25-26; (6) A-1, p. 2,4; A-3, p. 71.

countered during the advance; however, reports from the Office of Strategic Services and from prisoners of war indicated that the Hungarians would probably offer little, if any, resistance to our forces. (7)

GENERAL SITUATION

On the morning of 18 April 1945 the 71st Division launched the Corps attack from positions near Bayreuth. (See Map B) In spite of heavily wooded areas and a poor road net, the attack progressed rapidly, wiping out scattered pockets of enemy resistance. The advance overran small units of infantry and armor until 21 April, when XX Corps was ordered by Army to stop along a restraining line -- Hahnbach, Lauterhofen, Neumarkt. (8)

During the night of 21-22 April 1945, the 3d Cavalry Group reinforced by the 5th Ranger Battalion moved forward to the Corps' restraining line, and at 220600 April passed through the 71st and 65th Divisions to reconnoiter south and east in XX Corps zone. The reconnaissance force was to advance rapidly to capture and hold any bridges over the Danube River. If blocked enroute, they were to develop any organized enemy line of resistance so that the Infantry following could eliminate it more quickly. (9)

The 71st Division continued its attack at 220700 April and followed the Cavalry closely, encountering trivial resistance in its zone. (See Map B) 3d Cavalry successes were exploited by shuttling regimental combat teams forward as rapidly as possible. On 22 April the 66th Infantry Regiment

(7) A-1, p. 1; (8) A-1, p. 3; A-2, p. 358-360; A-3, p. 71; A-4, p. 25-26; (9) A-1, p. 4; A-3, p. 78.

secured a bridgehead over the Naab River at Burglengenfeld where elements of the 3d Cavalry held the bridge. The 5th Infantry Regiment pushed to Schwandorf on 23 April and captured a damaged railway bridge over the Naab. With the advantage of surprise, infantry rushed across the river and cleared Schwandorf taking approximately 500 enemy prisoners. (10)

Having established bridgeheads over the Naab at Schwandorf and Burglengenfeld, the 71st Division advanced to the Regen River utilizing the 5th and 66th Infantry Regiments in mopping up operations while the 14th Infantry Regiment by-passed the 5th and 66th to force a crossing of the Regen at Regenstauf. (See Map B) The 14th Infantry arrived at Regenstauf during the afternoon of 24 April and found it heavily defended. A coordinated attack drove the Germans to the east side of the river but was unsuccessful in seizing the damaged highway bridge. Assault boats were brought up and a hasty river crossing was initiated. Preceded by a heavy artillery and mortar preparation, elements of the Regiment crossed under enemy small arms, mortar, and artillery fire from the houses and hills on the far side. By late afternoon of 24 April, two battalions had gained the opposite bank and secured a bridgehead sufficiently deep for engineers to begin construction of a bridge. Enemy aircraft bombed the bridge site and strafed the town during the night but were not successful in knocking out the bridge. (11)

Shortly after daylight, 25 April, the 5th Regimental

(10) A-1, p. 4-5; A-2, p. 360, 362; A-3, p. 78-79;

(11) A-1, p. 5; A-2, p. 363; A-3, p. 79.

Combat Team had crossed to the east side of the Regen River on the 14th Infantry's bridge and was continuing on toward the Danube. The 66th Infantry continued advancing south toward Regensburg west of the Regen. (12)

SPECIAL SITUATION

As XX Corps swept to the Danube from the north, plans were made to cross as soon as approaches had been gained. An estimate of the situation indicated that if the assault were made immediately, the task would be less costly because the probability of surprise would be greater and the enemy would not have time to reinforce his defenses along the barrier. (13)

The Corps plan, to be initiated during the night of 25-26 April, 1945, was as follows. (See Map B) The 65th Division would cross south of Regensburg, swing north and capture the city; the 71st would assist the 65th by fire from north of Regensburg, cross the river east of the city, continue to attack southeast with two Regimental Combat Teams, and be prepared to attack Regensburg from the east with its remaining Regimental Combat Team. (14)

On receipt of the Corps order during the morning of 25 April, the 71st was breaking out of its bridgehead over the Regen at Regenstauf. In order to execute the order and accomplish its mission on time, the division accelerated movement to the Danube. Fragmentary oral orders for the crossing were issued due to the shortage of time. (15)

The plan was as follows. (See Map C) The division would

(12) A-1, p. 5; A-2, p. 363; A-3, p. 79; (13) A-1, p. 6; A-3, p. 80; (14) A-1, p. 6, 21; A-3, p. 80; A-4, p. 26; (15) A-3, p. 80.

advance to the Danube with three regiments abreast, the 5th on the left, the 14th in the center, and the 66th on the right. The river assault would be launched on a wide front at 260200 April by the 5th and 14th regiments in their respective zones. After crossing, the 5th Infantry was to advance and capture its objective cutting highway 8 from Regensburg to Straubing and be prepared to continue the attack southeast along the highway on order. The 14th Infantry was to cross and capture its objective cutting highway 8, make contact with the 5th Infantry on its left, be prepared to attack Regensburg from the east and/or to attack southeast abreast of the 5th on order. The 66th Infantry would support the 65th Division by firing on Regensburg from its positions north of the Danube, and also be prepared to cross the river in the zone of either the 5th or 14th regiments on order. Division Artillery reinforced by the 204th Field Artillery Group of XX Corps would be prepared to support the Division from the north side of the river and to cross on order. Division engineers would expedite the crossing assisted by the 1139th Engineer Combat Group of XX Corps, in direct support of the 71st. (16)

Division Artillery, consisting of the 607th Field Artillery Battalion, the 608th Field Artillery Battalion, the 609th Field Artillery Battalion (all 105 howitzers), and the 564th Field Artillery Battalion (155 howitzers) was to revert from combat team organization to centralized control. Battalion groupments were formed by placing battalions of

(16) A-1, p. 6; A-3, p. 80; A-5, p. 7; A-11; A-12; Statement of Maj. T.W. Alvey, a Company Commander, 14th Inf. Regt., 11 Mar 48.

the 204th Group in reinforcing missions under the direct support battalions. (17)

The 607th Field Artillery Battalion reinforced by the 204th Field Artillery Battalion (155 howitzers) was in direct support of the 5th Infantry Regiment. This battalion groupment was commanded by the commanding officer of the 607th and was under Division Artillery control. One battalion of eight inch howitzers comprised of six pieces was employed as general support under Division Artillery control in the zone of the 5th Infantry. Similar artillery groupments were in direct support of the other regiments in the Division and under Division Artillery control. (18)

COMBAT ORGANIZATION OF THE 607TH FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION

A brief review of the organization of a direct support battalion of light truck drawn artillery will aid in clarifying the combat organization of the 607th Field Artillery Battalion. During World War II, a battalion had a headquarters and headquarters battery, three firing batteries, and a service battery. In headquarters there were three liaison officers, one to work with each of the three battalions of an infantry regiment. Each firing battery had a forward observer section, a detail section, a battery headquarters, a maintenance section, and four howitzer sections.

In the 607th, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery carried the brunt of the communication responsibilities in order that the detail sections of each firing battery could be organized into three provisional forward observer teams, one of

(17) A-11; Personal knowledge; (18) A-7; A-9; A-11.

which was under the battery reconnaissance officer. This caused each firing battery to have a total of four forward observer teams, two of which were officer led. In addition, the Battalion Survey and Reconnaissance Officer of Headquarters and Headquarters Battery had a threefold function of reconnaissance, survey, and forward observation. This gave the Battalion a total of twelve battery forward observer teams that could be employed as needed and one additional forward observer team at battalion level, which was employed on special missions when not occupied with reconnaissance and survey. The extra communication and transportation equipment necessary was obtained by the Battalion S-4 from various unmentionable sources. (19)

The twelve battery forward observer teams were employed in rotation so that one team would be with each rifle company of the 5th Infantry at all times. The observers from "A" Battery habitually worked with the 1st Battalion, "B" Battery with the 2d Battalion, and "C" Battery with the 3d Battalion. There were three fire control nets, one of which was allotted to each firing battery. (See diagram 1) This allowed a separate radio channel of communication from each infantry battalion back to the artillery fire direction center and gun positions. It also provided an excellent communication system between the rifle companies of a battalion, since the forward observers with each company were on the same radio net. (20)

On occupation of a gun position, it was SOP in the 607th Field Artillery Battalion to install a complete wire

(19) A-9; Personal knowledge; (20) A-13; Personal knowledge.

net if possible. (See Diagram 2) Each firing battery would lay two lines of the battalion net, one from its gun position to the fire direction center and the other from its switchboard to the battalion switchboard. These lines were usually very short and required few personnel and little equipment to install. Headquarters and Headquarters Battery installed the command post net as well as lines to the 5th Infantry and to each liaison officer. Each forward observer team would string wire from the switchboard of the liaison officer to his forward observation post in the battalion area. Wire was the primary means of communication whenever the situation permitted. (21)

FROM THE REGEN TO THE DANUBE

The terrain in the zone of the 5th Infantry between the Regen River and the Danube River was characterized by numerous hills and low rough mountains. (See Map C) There were several small streams flowing from northeast to southwest which drained the area into the Danube River. Observation and fields of fire were generally good except in the area just north of the Danube where a heavy forest limited visibility. Scattered woods and the rough nature of the terrain provided adequate cover and concealment. Routes of communication for vehicles and artillery pieces consisted of an extensive net of very narrow and crooked dirt roads. There were no existing obstacles north of the Danube in the direction of advance other than the numerous villages which reduced mobility to a snail's pace. The weather had been clear and cool on 24

(21) A-13; Personal knowledge.

April and remained so through 25-27 April. (22)

After crossing the Regen River at Regenstauf, the 607th Field Artillery Battalion occupied gun positions near Wolfersdorf at approximately 251000 April. (See Map C) At that time the 5th Infantry was busy sweeping wooded areas some 2000 yards in front of the gun positions. This operation encompassed the entire width of the regimental zone and was over extremely hilly and wooded country. Consequently progress was slow and tedious. (23)

The Assistant S-3, Battalion Gunnery Officer, contacted Division Artillery by radio and obtained permission to register. A liaison plane was dispatched to observe and adjust the registration. Shortly afterward, the observer checked in by radio, and coordinates of a cross road about 8000 yards from the guns were sent to him from Fire Direction. He registered the number two piece of each battery on that point and then observed one round fired simultaneously from the number four pieces on a different target to check the battalion mass. The registration and position area survey were perfect, for the fire massed as if fired from one battery. (24)

About 1200 hours the Battalion Commander returned from the 5th Infantry Command Post and informed the battalion that the 5th had received orders to push to the Danube's north bank and be prepared to cross at 260200 April. Since the front of the regiment was approximately 20 kilometers from the river and the terrain exceptionally rough, the Battalion Commander anticipated the infantry would abandon their sweeping

(22) Personal knowledge; A-12; (23) Personal knowledge; A-9; A-12; (24) A-9.

operation and march as rapidly as possible to the river so as to arrive prior to darkness. In view of this, he planned to leap-frog the 607th and 204th Field Artillery Battalions in displacement to insure that one or the other would be in position and ready to support the infantry at all times. (25)

To guarantee rapid and efficient reconnaissance during the advance, the Battalion Commander planned to have the 607th occupy future positions near Altenthann and Wiesent successively. (See Map C) He informed the Commanding Officer, 204th, of this and told him to plan his reconnaissance so that his succeeding gun positions would be staggered between those of the 607th. This would enable each battalion to displace as a unit and accomplish the leap-frogging as planned. The plan also settled once and for all any disputes that might arise between the reconnaissance parties of each unit over which battalion was going to occupy what positions. (26)

Leaving the 607th under control of the Battalion Executive Officer for displacement, the Battalion Commander returned to the 5th Infantry Command Post where he could easily keep abreast of the rapidly changing situation. Reports from forward observers and liaison officers indicated that the infantry had reached a range of approximately 5000 yards and were continuing to sweep the regimental zone with three battalions abreast. Resistance warranting artillery fire had not been encountered, and the advance was slowed only by the nature of the terrain. (27)

(25) A-7; A-9; A-10; Personal knowledge; (26) A-7; Personal knowledge; (27) A-7; A-9; A-12; Personal knowledge.

The reconnaissance party, consisting of the S-3, the Reconnaissance and Survey Officer, the Headquarters Battery Commander (Communication Officer), the three firing battery commanders, and necessary communication and survey personnel departed from the battalion position to reconnoiter for routes forward and new gun positions in the vicinity of Altenthann. The party moved in five one quarter ton vehicles equipped with 610 radios. On the vehicle of the Reconnaissance and Survey Officer was mounted a .50 caliber machine gun. Instruments necessary to perform a quick position area survey in proposed gun positions were habitually carried in this vehicle. Four members of the Battalion Survey Team accompanied the Survey Officer on such reconnaissance. (28)

The infantry was quickly overtaken by the reconnaissance party, and the remainder of the move as far as Altenthann was made in company of the advance elements over two separate routes. At 1500 hours the battalion commander joined the reconnaissance party and learned that the best route over which the battalion could displace to Altenthann was through Pettenreuth. There was only one road capable of supporting a primemover, and no chance existed for the battalion to miss it: therefore, the Battalion Executive Officer was radioed to displace to Altenthann immediately. (29)

Shortly afterward the reconnaissance party reached the proposed position area at Altenthann, and gun positions were selected south and southwest of the town. (See Map C) The battalion front covered approximately 2000 yards with "A"

(28) (29) Personal knowledge.

Battery on the left, "C" Battery in the center, and "B" Battery on the right. The terrain sloped gently from Altenthann to a forest about 1000 yards to the south, providing excellent fields of fire for the howitzers. (30)

The Battery Commander of "B" Battery proceeded to his position area on the right to select installation sites and mark his howitzer positions. While reconnoitering the woods 1000 yards west of Altenthann for a battery motor park, he was ambushed by a group of 11 Germans led by an SS non-com. The Battalion Survey Officer heard the small arms firing which ensued and the Battery Commander's radio call for help. The Survey Party was quickly assembled and moved in their one quarter ton from the bench mark north of Altenthann to the north side of the woods. There they deployed on both sides of the vehicle and entered the woods behind the Germans. The enemy position was spotted and taken under fire from the rear with the .50 caliber machine gun and carbines. Four of the enemy including the SS non-com were killed, and the remainder surrendered. "B" Battery scout corporal had been wounded by the initial burst of enemy fire. (31)

The battery commanders completed their selection of howitzer positions and, consistent with the battalion SOP, marked the locations of the number two pieces with small red flags. The survey party rapidly finished the position area survey by utilizing the church steeple in Altenthann as a reference point and tying the number two piece of each battery into it through compass readings and triangulation. Con-

(30) (31) Personal knowledge.

trol was obtained by surveying in the church steeple from the bench mark north of Altenthann in a similar manner. (32)

About 1700 hours the battalion arrived and occupied the position. The Command Post was set up in a beer hall in Altenthann near a temporary Command Post established by the 5th Infantry. The guns were laid initially on a compass of 3200 mils and later shifted by fire direction so as to mass on a point chosen at random in the middle of the forest south of Altenthann. Because radio contact with Division Artillery had been lost, air observation could not be obtained. All forward observers were in the midst of the heavy forest south of Altenthann and were unable to locate a suitable registration point on which the battalion could be registered. The only maps available had a scale of 1:100,000, so the Gunnery Officer used a grid sheet with a scale of 1:20,000 for a firing chart. Vertical control was obtained as near as possible from the 1:100,000 maps which had a 25 meter contour interval. (33)

Shortly after the batteries were laid and ready to fire, a fire mission was received from a forward observer with the 1st Battalion. The 1st Battalion had encountered a defended enemy road block on the road from Altenthann to Sulzbach and was deploying its lead elements to attack. Because the forward observer was having difficulty in determining the location of his target, he requested that one round of white phosphorus be fired to commence the registration. Fire direction computed approximate data and had "C" Battery

(32) Personal knowledge; (33) Personal knowledge; A-9.

fire. The observer was unable to see the white phosphorus due to limited visibility in the forest, so he requested that a high air burst be fired above the trees to aid in locating his first round. This was done, and he spotted the round a few hundred yards over and to the left of the target by sound. A shift was made and another high burst fired to insure that friendly infantry would not suffer casualties as a result of too great a shift. This second burst appeared about 100 yards directly above the observer where he could easily see it. He shifted the fire to the road block and requested delayed fuze to get tree bursts on the enemy. All three batteries fired five volleys for effect, and the observer reported mission accomplished. The battalion mass was not as good as expected because the batteries had not been registered; however, the position area survey together with carefully declinated aiming circles used in laying resulted in the fire being sufficiently massed for effect. (34)

At 1800 hours the reconnaissance party of the 204th Field Artillery Battalion arrived at the Command Post of the 607th and joined the reconnaissance party of the latter. Both parties set out together for Brenenberg. At that time the 2d Battalion of the 5th Infantry was headed toward the town but did not anticipate reaching it before darkness. The Battalion Commander, 607th, desired that positions near Brenenberg for the 204th be reconnoitered, surveyed, and if possible occupied prior to darkness in order that the 155

(34) Personal knowledge; A-9.

howitzers could handle all fire missions while the 607th displaced to support the river crossing at 260200 April from Wiesent. The plan was for both reconnaissance parties to proceed together ahead of the infantry to prepare the 204th gun positions before darkness; the guns would displace to the positions at the earliest time consistent with safety.

(35)

Enroute to Brennberg, the reconnaissance parties made contact with a troop from the 3d Cavalry which had moved into the 5th Infantry's sector during the day. The Cavalry agreed to escort them to the town and outpost it through the night, thus protecting the 155 howitzer battalion. A radio message was sent back for displacement to take place immediately. The reconnaissance parties, accompanied by the cavalry, proceeded to Brennberg and selected gun positions in the open fields north of town. By the time the howitzers arrived, the combined efforts of both parties had prepared the positions for occupation. Darkness had fallen when the guns were reported ready to fire, so an attempt was made to obtain registration corrections by surveying in a high burst utilizing a base of approximately 1200 yards in length extending across the line of fire near the guns. Three rounds were fired and observed with aiming circles on either end of the base. At least six rounds should have been fired and instrument readings taken on each for such an adjustment to produce accurate corrections; however, the commanding officer of the 204th noted that the flash effect of the gun was very noticeable,

(35) Personal knowledge; A-7.

so he ordered the registration stopped to prevent the enemy from locating his positions. Corrections were computed which compared closely to those obtained during the preceeding night; therefore, they were used in succeeding fire missions and proved to be satisfactory. (36)

At approximately 2200 hours, a radio message was received from the Battalion Commander, 607th, ordering the 607th reconnaissance party to proceed to Frauenzell and contact a company of the 2d Battalion, 5th Infantry, which was closing on the town. The party was to follow the infantry to Wiesent and select gun positions in that vicinity for both the 607th and the 204th. The 607th would move during the night and prepare to support the infantry; the 204th would move during the morning of 26 April after the 607th had completed occupation of the position. (37)

The Battalion Commander, 204th, sent a portion of his reconnaissance party with the 607th personnel to look over the area near Wiesent. They were to return after seeing the area and act as guides on the following morning. (38)

The party reached Frauenzell at approximately 2300 hours and found no one except the village inhabitants. Having notified the Command Post of the situation, they were informed by Fire Direction that the infantry should arrive shortly. About 2400 hours "F" Company of the 2d Battalion appeared. Because they were completely exhausted from the long day's march, the Company Commander desired to rest his men for one half hour before continuing the march to the Danube. He re-

(36) Personal knowledge; (37) Personal knowledge; A-7;
(38) Personal knowledge.

ported his position to the 2d Battalion and learned that the crossing had been postponed until 260400 April. Since there was more time than necessary for him to reach his forward assembly area, the Company Commander decided to wait until 0100 before moving out, thus refreshing his men with a full hour's rest. If the reconnaissance party moved out at 0100, there would not be sufficient time to accomplish the necessary tasks and get the howitzers in position to support the crossing. The S-3 decided to go on ahead of the infantry with the Battalion Survey Group to select gun positions. The battery commanders could follow the infantry on to the Danube and utilize the remaining time before the battalion arrived to look over their position areas. (39)

The S-3 and Survey Officer moved out in two one quarter ton vehicles and proceeded to Wiesent. The trip was slowed only by extreme darkness within the forest north of the Danube. A brief reconnaissance in and around the town revealed no enemy activity and extremely marshy ground, so the Battery Commanders were radioed to proceed down the route just transgressed to aid in the reconnaissance. They arrived at about 0200 and reported that a radio message from the Battalion Commander received at Frauenzell indicated that the 607th had ⁽march ordered⁾ and was on the road moving to Wiesent from Altenthann. The Battalion Commander was leading the column and expected to arrive at Wiesent at approximately 0330 hours. An attempt was made to notify the battalion about the progress of the reconnaissance party, but contact

(39) Personal knowledge.

could not be established. Since the officer of the 204th Field Artillery Battalion accompanying the party planned to return to Brenenberg immediately, he agreed to guide the 607th from Frauenzell through the forest to Wiesent. Sufficient gun positions for one battalion had been located near Wiesent, so it was decided that these would be for the 204th to displace to as soon as the 607th was in position.

(40)

After the 204th personnel had parted, the reconnaissance party moved west from Wiesent to Kruckenberg. The latter town rested about 1000 yards north of the Danube and on the south side of a high wooded ridge which paralleled the river. (See Map C) The party split into two groups and proceeded over two narrow trails to the top of the ridge. North of the ridge the ground sloped gently down for about 500 yards to a small stream running parallel to the ridgeline. The western portion of the area was free of trees from the stream to the top of the ridge where heavy woods existed. In the eastern portion there were no trees, and a small church sat near the top of the ridge line. Gun positions were selected behind the ridge so as to take advantage of defilade and concealment offered by the terrain. "B" Battery was to go in on the left, "A" Battery in the center, and "C" Battery on the right. One disadvantage existed in that the battalion would have to occupy the position by passing over the two small trails on the south side of the ridge; this portion of the terrain feature was easily covered by enemy observation from

(40) Personal knowledge.

points several miles southeast, south, and southwest of the Danube due to the flat nature of the Danube Valley. However, it was thought that a night occupation of position would offset this disadvantage by providing necessary concealment over the trails leading to the area behind the ridgeline. (41)

The Battalion Survey Officer and his party performed a rough position area survey during darkness by pacing distances and measuring compasses with an aiming circle. Rough control was taken from a 1:100,000 scale map by starting the traverse from a crook in one of the trails into the position which could be located on the ground and on the map. (42)

The task of preparing the position area was completed by 0330 hours. The Survey Officer and his party returned to the northern limit of Wiesent to meet the Battalion and lead it to the new position area. After reaching the designated rendezvous, they established a small perimeter on a knoll adjacent to a roadside fish hatchery. In a short while the last elements of the 2d Battalion, 5th Infantry, passed the point and continued to close on the river. A long wait followed during which the Survey Officer attempted to contact the Battalion several times by radio. About 0600 hours daylight was apparent, and a heavy fog rose from the river to blanket the Danube Valley. The 607th finally appeared from the forest approximately thirty minutes later. (42)

In order to take advantage of the heavy fog to screen the movement up the south side of the ridgeline into position, the Survey Officer led the battalion to Kruckenberg at a rapid

(41) (42) Personal knowledge.

rate. There the Battery Commanders had guides to lead the guns into their respective position areas. While the batteries were occupying position, the initial survey was improved by rerunning it in daylight. The Command Post was established in Kruckenberg, and by 0730 hours the battalion was laid and ready to fire. (43)

When the 607th was displacing from Wolfersdorf to Altenthann, it lost radio contact with Division Artillery. The Division Artillery Command Post was in the process of displacing to the vicinity of Wenzelbach in the zone of the 14th Infantry Regiment. As a result, the message from the 607th to Division Artillery informing them of the displacement never reached the proper persons, and the 607th was carried on the situation map as being at Wolfersdorf. Communication with Division Artillery was not reestablished until Division had laid a wire line into the 5th Infantry Command Post (temporary) at Altenthann. The 607th was then able to communicate with Division Artillery through the 5th Infantry and Division switchboards. (44)

The Commanding General, Division Artillery, contacted the Battalion Executive Officer of the 607th by telephone at approximately 252100 April and reprimanded him because the 607th was allegedly in position at Wolfersdorf at that time. An explanation as to the position of the 607th at Altenthann must not have fully convinced the Commanding General, for shortly afterward the Division Artillery Executive Officer called by telephone and informed the Battalion Executive that

(43) Personal knowledge; A-9; (44) A-7; A-8; A-9.

the Battalion Commander was to report to Division Artillery Command Post immediately. At that time the Battalion Commander was on a route reconnaissance to Frauenzell in preparation for the displacement to Wiesent. After returning to the 607th Command Post, the Battalion Commander set out over the very rough and wooded terrain traveling under black-out conditions to find the Division Artillery Command Post, which was blacked out and at a distance of approximately fifteen miles to the west. When the Battalion Commander arrived at Division Artillery nearly one hour later, he told the Division Artillery S-3 the true location of the 607th Field Artillery Battalion and informed him where they would be on the following morning. From the Division Artillery Commander and his entire staff, he learned nothing of the situation which he did not already know. (45)

Before returning to Altenthann, the Battalion Commander telephoned the Battalion Executive Officer and told him to march order the 607th and be prepared to move out to Wiesent as soon as he arrived there. Shortly after midnight the battalion began its march from Altenthann to Wiesent under control of the Battalion Commander. Moving over a very poor road under black-out conditions at that time of night was extremely slow and tedious. By approximately 0230 hours the battalion reached Frauenzell and contacted the guide officer from the 204th sent by the reconnaissance party. For some unknown reason, the guide left the battalion for a few minutes after getting it started through Frauenzell. Against the

(45) A-7; A-8; A-9; A-10.

recommendations of the Battalion Executive Officer and the Battalion S-2, both of whom had made a short reconnaissance into the forest, the Battalion Commander, overly anxious to reach Wiesent and occupy position, proceeded into the forest without the guide. Instead of staying on the road to Wiesent, he turned at a secondary trail into the forest and followed it for quite awhile before it came to a dead end. Realizing his error, the Battalion Commander put the battalion to work turning the primemovers, vehicles, and guns around while he reconnoitered for a short cut out of the place. On his reconnaissance, he again contacted the guide who was busily engaged trying to find the battalion. Together they found a suitable trail leading to the proper road. Having lost considerable time turning the primemovers with their towed howitzers around in the dark forest, the battalion gained the correct road to Wiesent and met the Survey Officer shortly after daylight. (46)

THE RIVER CROSSING

While the 607th was going into position at Kruckenberg, the Battalion Commander departed for the 5th Infantry Command Post, established at Sulzbach during the night. (See Map C) On arrival, he found that the Regiment had been delayed until daylight in its crossing due to the engineer boat company's taking a wrong turn in the forest and becoming lost. Upon being located, the company had great difficulty in turning its heavy equipment around on the narrow road. By the time the boats reached the crossing sites in the vicinity of Bach,

(46) A-7; A-8; A-10.

daylight had come. (47)

The Regimental Commander's plan for the crossing was as follows: (See Map C) The 1st and 3d Battalions were to cross abreast in the vicinity of Bach, the 1st Battalion on the left. The 2d Battalion initially was to be prepared to support the crossing by fire if necessary, but was not to fire unless a fire fight developed. After the 1st and 3d Battalions gained the opposite bank, the 2d Battalion was to cross and swing to the left of the 1st Battalion. All three Battalions were to attack upon reaching the opposite bank to gain their portion of the Regimental Objective. Artillery was to be employed on call from the forward observers with each rifle company. The plan was based on achieving surprise and overrunning the enemy positions south of the river before the Germans could get themselves organized to repel attack. (48)

At the 5th Infantry crossing site, the Danube was approximately 125 yards wide and flowed at a rate of about eight miles per hour. The banks rose from the river an average of three and one half feet and were protected from erosion by rock shoring. The south side of the river was flat pasture land except for a fifteen foot earth dyke which nearly paralleled the river about 300 yards from it. Numerous villages and several patches of forest dotted the landscape. (49)

Screened by fog on the river, the lowering of boats for crossing the first waves was accomplished without incident. On the opposite bank at intervals of five or ten yards along

(47) A-7; A-12; (48) A-12; (49) Personal knowledge; A-12.

the entire river were found Germans, who apparently had slept soundly throughout the night. The infantry rounded them up out of foxholes where they were wrapped in their blankets, most of them still asleep. The enemy had no security posted, and surprise was complete. (50)

The 1st and 3d Battalions advanced south from the river until they reached the dirt dyke where they ran into their first fire fight. Germans in the towns of Friesheim and Illkofen commenced firing on them with small arms and machine guns. The 3d Battalion cleared Friesheim with little effort. The 1st Battalion paused along the dirt dyke and returned the enemy fire from Illkofen. Shortly thereafter, heavy mortar fire traversed and searched the area of the dirt dyke causing a number of casualties. Instead of pushing on through the mortar fire into the town of Ilkofen, the 1st Battalion committed the cardinal sin of digging-in in place, thus fixing their position for the enemy to blast freely with mortars. (51)

The forward observers and liaison officers called frantically over their radios for artillery to fire near Ilkofen. At that time the 607th was dropping trails and preparing to fire from their positions at Kruckenbergl. The Gunnery Officer relayed the mission to the 204th Field Artillery Battalion, which immediately opened fire with one battery for adjustment. The first salvo landed close enough to the 1st Battalion to scare them into every hole existing in the locality. No American soldiers were hurt, however, one of the

(50) A-12; (51) A-9; A-12; Personal knowledge.

155 mm rounds landed among a group of prisoners near the dyke and blew about fifty percent of them all over the area in numerous small pieces. The Liaison Officer with the 1st Battalion radioed to cease firing and check data; this was done and the 204th reported back that everything checked. During the time which ensued, the observer collected his wits and continued to adjust the fire by shifting it to the enemy. After the mission was completed, a brief investigation of the short rounds revealed that the observer in the excitement of initial contact had made a bad plot of the enemy mortars on his 1:100,000 map. The plot was approximately 500 yards off, causing the fire to land close to friendly infantry.

(52)

Shortly after the initial call for fire support, the 607th completed preparation to fire. There was no time for registration of the battalion, for fire missions came in from every observer with the 1st and 3d Battalions. In the meantime the 2d Battalion had completed its crossing of the river and was running into trouble on the left. Calls for fire were answered by firing battery missions and relaying calls on to the 204th. For the next thirty minutes, every battery was firing continuously, with fire direction handling three missions at once. Observers with all three battalions of the 5th called for missions simultaneously which varied from white phosphorus for screening, incendiary, and casualty effects, to time and ricochet for neutralization of enemy in open emplacements. The towns of Ilkofen, Auburg, and

(52) A-7; A-9; Personal knowledge.

Altach were burning brightly as a result of this firing. The Infantry moved forward and the enemy withdrew before them.

(53)

When the first lull in firing came, the Gunnery Officer, attempted to contact Division Artillery to get a liaison plane to adjust a battalion registration. The Division Artillery wire line was not open at that time and radio contact was impossible, so observation from a ground OP was resorted to. Due to the flat terrain south of the Danube, the forward observers were unable to observe a registration point that could be definitely located on their maps. Therefore, the Battalion S-2 and the Survey Officer ascended the highest portion of the ridge behind which the howitzers were located and established a battalion observation post that commanded the valley to the south. (54)

The church in Geisling and the battalion OP were located definitely through a simple survey operation, and the number two piece of each battery was registered on the church by the observers at the battalion OP. The battalion mass was checked by firing a battalion concentration for effect on the next fire mission that came from a forward observer. (55)

About 260900 April, the enemy began to shell the crossing site of the 5th Infantry with light artillery fire. The rounds came in spasmodically all morning, but never in sufficient mass to hamper effectively the ferries in operation. However, the shelling and poor bridge sites did cause the engineers to shift their efforts to the 14th Infantry's zone

(53) A-9; A-12; Personal knowledge; (54) (55) A-9; A-10; Personal knowledge.

where they worked to install a pontoon bridge at Donaustauf. Counter battery fire was attempted throughout the day by the 607th and 204th, both firing massed concentrations on suspected enemy gun positions. One concentration from both battalions registered on a barn in the northern limits of Geisling was successful in knocking out two enemy artillery pieces, but the exact effect of other counter battery fire is unknown. (56)

Throughout the remainder of the day, the infantry pushed on toward their objective against weakening German resistance. Reports indicated that the enemy had not been in large force, but were so placed on key terrain that they were rather difficult to dislodge. During the afternoon calls for fire missions became less frequent. At 1500 hours the S-3 took stock of the ammunition in the battalion groupment and found that about 1600 rounds of 105 mm and 155 mm had been fired at targets of opportunity during the day's action. (57)

As the infantry battalions gained their objectives about 1800 hours, plans for protective fires began to arrive by messenger from the Liaison Officers. The S-3 and the Gunnery Officer were busily engaged in consolidation of the fire plans when a weak radio signal was received from the Liaison Officer with the 3d Battalion. He was requesting a fire mission on Mintraching which the infantry was about to assault. Fire direction radioed him to send his mission, but the Liaison Officer continued to call as if he had not

(56) A-10; Personal knowledge; (57) A-7; A-9.

received the signal. A relay station was dispatched to the high ground north of Kruckenberg. Before this station could start operating, the Liaison Officer radioed that if fire direction could hear his signal, they should fire one round of white phosphorus on the town. This was extreme range for the 105's so the mission was relayed to the 155's. The observer spotted the round and adjusted the mission utilizing one way radio communications. After the artillery had lifted, the infantry assaulted the town but were unable to dislodge the defending SS troops. Except for Mintraching, the Regimental objective had been taken prior to darkness. The Liaison Officer on inspection of his radio set found that the batteries in his receiver had dissipated to uselessness during the day. He had no spare batteries with him; therefore, a special messenger was dispatched to deliver a stock during the night. (58)

Approximately 270100 April enemy infantry and tanks launched a counterattack against the right flank of the 5th Infantry. Defensive fires in that area were provided by the 204th because of the extreme range. The 155's opened fire on call from the forward observers and aided the front line elements in repelling the enemy. (59)

Division G-4 phoned the Command Post of the 607th at 0200 hours and accomplished the necessary coordination for displacement to the south side of the Danube at 270600 April. The only bridge across the river was a pontoon type that had been installed at Donaustauf in the zone of the 14th Infantry.

(58) A-7; A-9; Personal knowledge; (59) A-7; A-9; A-10.

The reconnaissance party left immediately to find gun positions near Friesheim, and the battalion march ordered at 0400 hours. By 270700 April the howitzers were in position south of the Danube and firing in support of the 5th Infantry's attack southeast toward Straubing. (60)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In analyzing and criticizing the 607th Field Artillery Battalion's role in crossing the Danube River, consideration should be given the three fundamentals necessary for an artillery unit to effectively function -- namely, movement, firepower, and communication. If any one of the three is lacking, artillery will not and cannot accomplish its mission. Taking each one in turn, a brief general study will reveal that the 607th was thoroughly trained and experienced in all three and that any difficulties encountered by the battalion during the period 25-27 April 1945 were a direct result of terrain, organization for combat, and ineffective leadership by commanders concerned.

In regarding movement, the fact that the battalion displaced over very rough terrain in daylight and darkness overcoming a number of discouraging incidents is an indication that the personnel who performed the tasks knew their jobs. Reconnaissance was deliberately planned and continuously executed throughout the operation so that gun positions were prepared prior to occupation.

The move from Wolfersdorf to Altenthann during daylight was accomplished rapidly, efficiently, and without incident

(60) A-7; A-9.

in spite of poor routes and rough terrain. If the battalion commander of the 607th had utilized his staff properly and exercised better judgement in executing the night displacement from Altenthann to Kruckenberg, this portion of the operation also would have passed without incident. He should not have led the battalion into the forest between Frauenzell and Wiesent without first being sure of his route. There were three other possible courses of action open to him. The battalion commander could have waited for the guide to return; he could have contacted the reconnaissance party by radio from Frauenzell to obtain another guide; or he could have dispatched his staff on route reconnaissance to Wiesent. Instead of any one of the above courses of action, he chose to take an uncalculated risk which ended with the battalion's getting lost in the dark forest. Had it not been for the superior performance of the personnel in overcoming the incident, the batteries would never have occupied their positions at Kruckenberg. The time lost in correcting the error still resulted in a delay of supporting fires in spite of the fact that the infantry had been delayed in their crossing until approximately 260700 April. Had it not been for favorable weather conditions which afforded a heavy fog to conceal movement up the ridge into positions at Kruckenberg, the time lost also would have resulted in placing the battalion in a precarious position.

Indirectly the Division Artillery Commander was partially responsible for the battalion commander's actions at this stage of the operation. The order for him to report to Di-

vision Artillery Command Post just prior to a night displacement over difficult terrain was completely unnecessary and caused valuable time to be wasted. As a result the 607th's displacement to Wiesent started later than planned. In his anxiety to complete the move on time to support the 5th Infantry at 260400 April, H-hour for the crossing, the battalion commander exercised poor judgement at Frauenzell.

In consideration of firepower, it must be remembered that the potential of an artillery piece and its ammunition is valueless if fire cannot be placed on a target at the proper time and in sufficient quantity to be effective. The ability of an artillery battalion to accomplish this is directly proportional to the training of its personnel. Observers must locate targets and adjust fire rapidly; fire direction augmented by survey must be an efficient aid to the observers and a director of the guns; the firing batteries must lay, load, and fire with a maximum of speed and accuracy. Teamwork among all agencies concerned is the essence of success.

The 607th fired effectively throughout the operation from each position occupied. In spite of difficulties encountered in observation and registration the battalion was able to deliver accurate massed fires on call. Initiative, forethought, and a thorough knowledge of artillery enabled the personnel to accomplish this.

In passing to communications, the type of tactical operation, the terrain, and the organization for combat must be considered. From the Regen River to the final objective, the operation was essentially a pursuit. The rap-

idly changing situation made installation of a complete wire net impossible, and as a result radio became the primary means of communication. Wire was utilized between the gun positions and the command post installations only. The value of telephone communication was thoroughly realized on occasions when Division Artillery could not be contacted and when observers had difficulty getting through fire missions.

The effect of the rugged terrain north of the Danube on radio transmission and reception was very apparent. Operational ranges for the SCR 610 and SCR 608 were reduced considerably as a result of the hill masses and forest. However, the radio operators' ingenuity enabled the various stations within the battalion to communicate effectively most of the time. Contact with Division Artillery was always impossible because of the distances involved.

In organization of the Division Artillery for combat, the Division Artillery Commander failed to consider how communication would be effected by the width of the Division's zone, the terrain, and the nature of the operation. The 5th Infantry's zone of action was continuously out of communicating range with Division Artillery. Upon discovery of this fact, the 607th Battalion Groupment should have been attached to the 5th Infantry for the operation, thus allowing the Battalion Commander of the 607th more freedom of action. Because of communication difficulties, in direct support the groupment was harrassed and hampered rather than aided by Division Artillery.

Another fallacy in the Division Artillery Commander's organization for combat was his employment of the liaison aircraft. The battalion had two organic planes which operated from the Division Artillery air strip under centralized control. Principally because of communication failure, the 607th was able to call on air observation only once during the entire operation. At least one of the airplanes should have been released to the battalion to insure air observation when needed. It would have been invaluable for missions of reconnaissance and observation throughout the operation.

LESSONS

Outstanding lessons noted during the period of this operation are:

1. In the pursuit phase of combat, relentless pressure on the enemy results in rapid destruction of his forces, thus saving time, equipment, and personnel.
2. In any phase of combat there is no substitute for surprise to achieve an easy victory.
3. Indirect fire weapons are most effective when employed in mass.
4. Against enemy personnel, the .50 caliber machine gun is a superior weapon for both physical and psychological effects.
5. Whenever possible in a tactical situation, commanders should supply the means of getting orders down to subordinates instead of having them leave their commands to report for orders.
6. Detail planning and thorough reconnaissance is

essential to successful night operations.

7. If there is time available, gun positions and assembly areas should always be thoroughly reconnoitered and secured prior to occupation. This is particularly true during a fast moving situation in which enemy are easily by-passed.

8. A high burst fired by artillery is an excellent method of orienting observers and infantry working in heavily wooded areas.

9. Any commander who does not utilize his staff properly is failing in his responsibility as a commander. One man cannot possibly perform all the tasks for which a staff is provided; failure to delegate work and responsibility to the staff results in uncoordinated effort, mistakes, and failure.

10. Cooperation among all arms to assist infantry in taking objectives is the surest mode of winning battles.